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PRESIDENT THIEU INTERVIEWED BY JAPANESE CORRESPONDENTS

SG 70430 SAIGON DAN CHU IN VIETNAMESE 7 MAR 75 PP 1, 5 SG

REPORT BY PHAM TRAN ON INTERVIEW GRANTED BY RVN PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU TO 12 JAPANESE PRESS CORRESPONDENTS AT INDEPENDENCE PALACE ON 5 MARCH (1975)

(TEXT) PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU SAID WEDNESDAY THAT "NOTHING WILL IMPEDE ME IF I DECIDE TO RUN FOR ANOTHER TERM NEXT OCTOBER." HOWEVER, HE ADDED: "SO FAR I HAVE NOT YET MADE A DEFINITE DECISION."

THE RVN LEADER MADE THIS STATEMENT IN AN INTERVIEW GRANTED TO 12 JAPANESE PRESS CORRESPONDENTS PERMANENTLY ASSIGNED TO SAIGON.

PRESIDENT THIEU CONSIDERED AS HIS "PRIVATE AFFAIR" WHETHER OR NOT HE WOULD SEEK REELECTION, AND HE SAID HE WOULD NOT NEED TO CREATE A NOISY ATMOSPHERE REGARDING THIS MATTER OR TO RESORT TO "POLITICAL MANEUVERS TO WIN THE ELECTION, BECAUSE THIS WILL NOT HELP ACHIEVE SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP."

THE JAPANESE PRESS CORRESPONDENTS ASKED HIM AT LEAST FOUR TIMES WHETHER HE HAD MADE A DEFINITE DECISION. HE THEN ANSWERED: "TO ME, SEEKING OR NOT SEEKING REELECTION IS ONLY A MATTER OF CONFIDENCE. IF I WERE SUPPORTED BY THE PEOPLE, I WOULD WIN THE MAJORITY OF VOTES. OTHERWISE, I WOULD HAVE A MINORITY." HE ADDED: "IF THE PEOPLE ASK ME TO STAY, I WILL STAY. IF THEY WANT ME TO CONTINUE ASSUMING MY RESPONSIBILITY, I WILL BE READY."

HOWEVER, IN HIS ANSWER, PRESIDENT THIEU SPOKE OF THREE BASIC ASPECTS THAT COULD PROMPT HIM TO SEEK REELECTION:

1. THE ATTAINMENT OF ECONOMIC PROSPERITY.
2. THE CAPABILITY OF CHECKING THE COMMUNIST GENERAL OFFENSIVE.
3. THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY.

HE STRESSED THAT ATTAINMENTS IN THESE THREE ASPECTS COULD PROMPT HIM TO RUN FOR ANOTHER TERM.

THE TERMS OF OFFICE OF PRESIDENT THIEU AND VICE PRESIDENT NGUYEN HUONG EXPIRE NEXT OCTOBER.

THERE WILL BE AN ELECTION TO THE LOWER HOUSE NEXT AUGUST. DEPUTIES ARE PREPARING FOR A REELECTION WHILE MANY POLITICAL PARTIES AND INDIVIDUALS ARE DOING THE SAME.

IN HIS CONTACT WITH THE JAPANESE PRESS CORRESPONDENTS, PRESIDENT THIEU MADE CLEAR THAT IN HIS OPINION, THE FACT THAT IF HE SEEKS REELECTION MUST BE CONCEIVED OF AS A DUTY TO FIGHT FOR THE COUNTRY, BECAUSE THE RVN IS IN WARTIME AND NOT IN PEACETIME. MOREOVER, HE IS NOT A POLITICIAN--A TERM OFTEN ATTRIBUTED TO A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE.

THE JAPANESE PRESS CORRESPONDENTS POSED QUESTIONS ABOUT CORRUPTION AND THE THIRD FORCE, AND PRESIDENT THIEU'S ANSWERS CAN BE SUMMARIZED AS FOLLOWS:

WE CANNOT SAY THAT CORRUPTION HAS BEEN COMPLETELY ERADICATED, BUT WE MUST RECOGNIZE THAT CORRUPTION HAS DIMINISHED QUITE A BIT. CONSIDERABLE PUNISHMENT HAS BEEN ENFORCED IN THE ADMINISTRATION AND ARMY AND WILL BE CONTINUED. NO ONE CAN ERADICATE CORRUPTION COMPLETELY, NOT EVEN THE UNITED STATES. ONLY WHEN EVERYONE HAS BECOME A SAINT OR BUDDHA IN THIS WORLD CAN WE EXPECT THE END OF CORRUPT PRACTICES. IN A COUNTRY WHICH HAS BEEN AT WAR FOR 30 YEARS AND WHICH IS ENCOUNTERING ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES, AND AT A TIME WHEN THE GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES MUST INCUR CONSIDERABLE EXPENSES WHILE EARNING SMALL SALARIES, IT IS TRULY DIFFICULT TO AVOID CORRUPTION.

PRESIDENT THIEU ALSO SPOKE OF BLACKMARKEETEERING AND CORRUPTION PREVALENT IN NORTH VIETNAM AND CONCLUDED: "A WAR-TORN COUNTRY LIKE SOUTH VIETNAM HAS EXACTLY THE SAME PROBLEMS AS FRANCE, JAPAN, ETC... BEFORE AND AFTER WORLD WAR II. AND THAT IS NO SURPRISE AT ALL."

REGARDING THE ALLEGATIONS THAT HE HAS BEEN ENGAGED IN CORRUPT PRACTICES, HE SAID THAT HE DEEMED IT UNNECESSARY TO DENY THEM BECAUSE THE DENIAL WILL BE FOLLOWED BY OTHER SLANDEROUS INDICTMENTS BECAUSE THE PRODUCERS OF THE INDICTMENTS CAN WRITE MANY SUCH INDICTMENTS HOURLY AND DAILY. HE SAID: "I CAN AFFIRM THAT IT IS NOT JUST NOW THAT THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE HAVE KNOWN THAT I HAVE NOT BEEN ENGAGED IN CORRUPT PRACTICES. IF HAVE BEEN, I CERTAINLY WOULD NOT BE SO STUPID AS TO SECURE SOME REAL ESTATE HERE FOR MY WEEK-END LEAVE OR A NUMBER OF ORCHARDS IN LONG XUYEN OR LONG KHANH. I COULD DO EVERYTHING AS AN ORDINARY CITIZEN, ACCORDING TO LAW."

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XXX ACCORDING TO LAW."

"TEXT: 'IF I WANT TO HAVE LAND TO TILL, I MUST PURCHASE IT ACCORDING TO THE LAW LIKE OTHER PEOPLE. IF I WERE A BIG CORRUPT ELEMENT, I WOULD HAVE MY REAL ESTATE IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES FOR MY ENJOYMENT. THEN I WOULD HAVE QUIT THE PRESIDENCY IN 1971 TO ENJOY THE FRUITS OF CORRUPT PRACTICES WHILE I WAS STILL YOUNG. HOW CAN I ENJOY MYSELF NOW THAT I AM GETTING OLD? HOW CAN I GO ABROAD TO ENJOY MYSELF NOW THAT MY COUNTRY IS STILL IN A STATE OF WAR? SOME POLITICIANS HAVE REAL ESTATE AND CATTLE IN CANNES, NICE AND SWITZERLAND BUT NOT ME."

ANSWERING A QUESTION RAISED BY A NEWSMAN RELATED TO THE FACT THAT HIS NAME WAS MENTIONED IN INDICTMENTS NUMBERS 1 AND 2, THE PRESIDENT SAID: "ANYONE CAN TELL LIES, SO CAN OPPOSITION POLITICIANS AND THE COMMUNISTS. SOMETIMES THEY HELP ONE ANOTHER."

AP QUOTED KYODO AS SAYING THAT PRESIDENT THIEU HAD TOLD THE JAPANESE CORRESPONDENTS THAT HE IS READY TO RETURN TO THE PARIS CONFERENCE TABLE. HOWEVER, THE PRESIDENT SAID: "THE PRESENT DIFFICULT PROBLEM IS HOW TO SELECT THE THIRD PARTY. MANY OF THOSE CALLING THEMSELVES MEMBERS OF THE THIRD PARTY OBVIOUSLY HAVE THE VIET CONG BEHIND THEM."

WITH REGARD TO THE THIRD PARTY, PRESIDENT THIEU ONCE AGAIN SAID THAT THIS IS NOTHING BUT "THE PRODUCT OF THE FRENCH COLONIALISTS AND THE COMMUNISTS." CAN ANY OF THOSE CALLING THEMSELVES MEMBERS OF THE THIRD PARTY DEMONSTRATE THEIR REAL STRENGTH? RIGHT IN SAIGON SOME PEOPLE HAVE CLAIMED THAT THEY BELONG TO THIS OR THAT ORGANIZATION, BUT IN REALITY THEY DO NOT HAVE ANY SUPPORT.

THE PRESIDENT AGAIN MENTIONED THE FUNDAMENTAL STAND OF THE RVN, ACCORDING TO WHICH IT ALWAYS STANDS READY TO DISCUSS THE PROBLEM RELATED TO THE FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND CONCORD WITH THE COMMUNIST SIDE PROVIDED THAT THE COMMUNISTS AGREE TO OBSERVE THE CEASE FIRE FIRST.

ALONG WITH ANSWERING QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE ECONOMIC DOMAIN, THE PRESIDENT ALSO DISCLOSED THAT HE HAD CANCELED A NUMBER OF VISITS TO ALLIED COUNTRIES SUCH AS THAILAND BECAUSE

HE WAS THEN PRESSED BY SO MANY DOMESTIC AFFAIRS. THIS YEAR HE WILL BE BUSY WITH THE ELECTION OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES AND THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, AND IS THEREFORE NOT SURE WHETHER HE WILL VISIT ANY COUNTRY OR NOT. HOWEVER, HE STANDS READY TO THINK IT OVER IN CASE THERE IS AN INVITATION.

WITH REGARD TO FOREIGN AID, THE PRESIDENT EXPRESSED THE BELIEF THAT IT MAY BE THAT IN THE COMING 3 YEARS THE RVN WILL NOT NEED AID, BUT JUST ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH OTHER GOVERNMENTS AND AN INCREASE IN INVESTMENTS IN THE RVN ON THE PART OF BUSINESSMEN AND INDUSTRIALISTS.

HOWEVER, PRESIDENT THIEU WARNED THAT THE RVN WOULD FALL IN SEVERAL MONTHS IF U.S. AID SHOULD BE CUT OFF TOTALLY.

KYODO QUOTED THE RVN PRESIDENT AS SAYING THAT "THE UNITED STATES MUST KEEP ITS COMMITMENT WITH ITS ALLY. WE NEEDED A MINIMUM OF \$1.6 BILLION IN AID THIS YEAR, BUT THEY REDUCED IT TO \$700 MILLION. THAT IS WHY OUR TROOPS HAVE BEEN ON THE DEFENSIVE FOR MONTHS."

THE RVN PRESIDENT ADDED: "EVEN IF THE U.S. CONGRESS APPROPRIATES AN ADDITIONAL \$300 MILLION IN AID, IT WOULD ONLY BE ENOUGH TO BUY FUEL AND AMMUNITION FOR THE ARVN, BUT NOT THE TANKS AND AIRCRAFT WE DESPERATELY NEED."

PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU ALSO COMPLAINED THAT U.S. EFFORTS AFTER THE 1973 PARIS AGREEMENT TO BRING PEACE TO INDOCHINA HAD CLEARLY FAILED.

THE RVN PRESIDENT ALSO ADDED: "U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE KISSINGER PROMISED THAT HE WOULD PRESSURE MOSCOW TO PERSUADE PEKING AND HANOI NOT TO USE FORCE, AND THE RESULT IS WHAT IT IS TODAY."

ENDALL)

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